

Remote Assessments FAQ General Information

***Virginia Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services
Virginia Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program***

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING
COVID-19-RELATED REMOTE ASSESSMENTS**

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How is VELAP responding to the challenges brought by COVID-19?

VELAP assessors and management have continued to work throughout the pandemic to provide ongoing services to certified and accredited laboratories. However, on-site assessments were put on hold from March 2020 through August 2020 due to safety concerns. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the need for establishing an alternate approach to performing onsite laboratory assessments to ensure safety for the assessed laboratory staff, and for accreditation body staff.

To meet VELAP's ongoing responsibility to perform assessments of laboratories accredited under 1VAC30-46, or certified under 1VAC30-41, 1VAC30-45, or the Tuning Fork Protocol (QT 2364), VELAP is implementing procedures to conduct assessments remotely using increased focus on pre-assessment data package review and interviews done by video or telephone conferencing.

When will remote assessments be used?

Remote assessments will be used for laboratory assessments until further notice.

What should my laboratory expect a remote assessment to be like?

Assessors will review a sampling of the records and documents that support the laboratory's accreditation or certification, and assessors will conduct staff interviews virtually.

Remote sessions using teleconferencing will be limited to no more than 4 hours per day unless mutually agreeable to extend. A session for approximately two hours in the morning with another of similar length in the afternoon, with any requested documents provided after each session, will be the standard daily format.

What kind of technology will my laboratory need?

Remote interviews will be conducted using videoconferencing (preferred) or telephone conferencing. Internet service is required for videoconferencing. VELAP will host videoconferences using a common platform such as Google Meet or Microsoft Teams and

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will send a link to the laboratory for the conference. These videoconference meetings have become familiar to many people since the pandemic began and may have already been used by laboratories.

Upon request and if available, VELAP may loan a document camera to a laboratory for the assessment. VELAP will determine the approval for this loan after review of the laboratory's pre-assessment data package and after discussion with the laboratory regarding the laboratory's own technical capabilities. If needed, VELAP will ship the document camera to the laboratory with a return shipping label, based on the laboratory's commitment to ensure the equipment is shipped back by UPS within 24 hours of the closing conference. Document cameras connect by USB to personal computers and laptops and provide a means to present paper documents such as bench sheets and logbooks to others on the videoconference. These document cameras double as webcams.

Since every situation is different, VELAP will host a "pre-meeting" for the purpose of testing the videoconferencing capability of the laboratory and answer questions before the scheduled assessment.

My laboratory is operating with reduced staff as a result of the pandemic. What considerations will be made for this issue?

VELAP understands the hardships and concerns caused by COVID-19 impacting small businesses, local governments, and individuals. VELAP is committed to working with laboratories to schedule and carry out remote assessments in the manner most suitable to the laboratory, providing flexibility as necessary. Discuss your concerns and questions with your assessor so that VELAP can provide options suitable to your laboratory's situation.

What happens if my laboratory cannot participate in a remote assessment at this time?

When the concerns or obstacles can be addressed in a mutually satisfactory manner, the remote assessment will be planned.

How much experience does VELAP have with remote assessments to date and what has been the general consensus from participating laboratories?

VELAP performed more than 35 remote assessments prior to January 31, 2021 including laboratories in all programs administered by the DCLS Laboratory Certification Group. VELAP has received strongly positive feedback from participating laboratories. Both VELAP and the certified and accredited laboratories have demonstrated resilience and cooperation in managing unusual circumstances to continue to manage their respective responsibilities under the Virginia regulations.

Please direct any additional questions by email to Lab_Cert@dqs.virginia.gov.